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ABSTRACT

This document examines the concept of gender bias communication in the classroom and how educators can avoid it. Gender bias communication is a set of behaviors that reflect bias or stereotyping, but which is not against the law. In the classroom, a teacher may treat male and female students differently without even realizing it. For instance, a teacher may make eye contact with males more than females, or ignore females while responding to males. Verbally, the instructor may ask higher order questions of males, or respond more often to males' comments. Gender bias communication manifests itself in less teacher attention to, lower scores for, and greater criticism of, female students. In the long term, such bias may result in less academic fields, and lower salaries. It is necessary for educators to be aware of and to work to overcome gender bias in the classroom. Society encourages bias in advertising, in literature, and even in schoolbooks. Teachers must take care to avoid bias through such methods as asking for student evaluation of teaching techniques and requesting classroom observation by colleaques. The document includes a teacher self-evaluation questionnaire, guidelines for classroom observation, suggestions for audio self-evaluation, and a student perception questionnaire. Contains 12 references. (SG)

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# GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

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# GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Monday 2-2:45 PM
WATERLOO ROOM, FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Workshop presented by Lisa M. Orick at the 1993 NISOD Conference "Teaching Excellence" in Austin, Texas.

## GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

In this presentation you will learn what gender bias communication in the classroom is, the negative effects, how to become aware of gender bias communication, and how to overcome gender bias communication in **YOUR** classroom. All this in 45 minutes!

### OBJECTIVES

1. Define and describe gender bias communication.
2. Define and describe the negative effects of gender bias communication.
3. Describe how instructors can become aware of gender bias communication in their classroom.
4. Describe several ways instructors can overcome gender bias communication in their classroom.

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## WHAT IS GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION?

Definition: Behaviors which reflect bias or stereotyping, but are not against the law.

A study conducted by Hall and Sandler (1982) found several ways in which teachers treat male and female students differently, thereby reinforcing and perpetuating sex-role stereotypes.

**NONVERBAL GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR**

a. Making eye contact with males more than with females
b. Nodding and gesturing more often in response to males' questions and comments than to females
c. Assuming an attentive posture when males speak, but an inattentive posture when females speak
d. Sitting or standing nearer to male students than female students
e. Ignoring female students while responding or recognizing male students
f. Waiting longer for males than females to respond to the instructor before going on to another student
g. Interrupting female students
h. Allowing female students to be interrupted by their peers

**VERBAL GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION**

a. Giving males detailed instructions on how to complete a particular problem, expecting them to succeed on their own after a time
b. Supplying the answer or doing the problem for females
c. Allowing female students to fail with less instruction
d. Calling directly on male students but not on female students
e. Calling male students by name more often than female students
f. Helping male students with hints for the answer, or by using probing questions that enable the male student to answer
g. Asking higher order questions of males (evaluation and critical thinking)
h. Asking lower order questions of females (factual)
i. Responding more to males' comments than to females' comments
j. Crediting males' comments to the speaker ("as Don pointed out") but not giving credit to females for their answers
k. Using examples which perpetuate sex-role stereotypes and/or negative views of females
l. Using the generic "he" or "man" to represent both males and females



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## NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION

What you expect to happen can color what you actually see. Expectations are assumptions or inferences that teachers may make about the basic ability of students. The importance of these beliefs was demonstrated by Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968). When teachers were told that randomly selected students had been identified as "intellectual late bloomers," teacher behavior changed enough to have a significant positive effect on student performance, both in the classroom and on I.Q. tests.

Gender is one of the most important variables that determine the expectations of teachers. Good (1981) identified several ways in which teachers vary their behavior toward students they perceive to be low achievers (or of the "weaker sex"):

a. providing general, often sincere praise
b. providing them with less feedback
c. demanding less effort from these students
d. interrupting these students more often
e. seating them farther away from the instructor
f. paying less attention to them
g. calling on them less often
h. waiting less time for them to respond to questions
i. criticizing them more often
j. smiling at them less

Compared to males, females are more likely to:

- -score lower on standardized tests
- -receive less attention at every grade level regardless of whether the teacher is male or female
- -receive feedback for nonacademic rather than academic work
- -receive few difficult questions

And less likely to:

- -be admitted to a college of their choice
- -have opportunities for academic enrichment programs in college
- -have jobs in math and science fields
- -have higher salaries



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Compared to males in employment, females are more likely to:

- -earn less money
- -be clerical and administrative support workers
- -live under the poverty level
- -be single, widowed, divorced or separated
- -avoid science-related careers
- -be unfamiliar with tools, work procedures, terminology, and job duties associated with skilled craft jobs

Both males and females are hurt---just in different ways:

-In grade school males are not good readers; teachers don't expect them to sit for a long period of time; they expect males to be "rowdy".

-Males are given more detailed instructions and told "no" when they ask for help; they learn not to ask for help; this affects their communication behavior.

-Males dominate a class in mixed gender classes; in other situations are seen as aggressive.

-Males have lower GPA's at the time they take the SAT; portion of grades depend on participation/attitude (good behavior); males don't earn these points.

## HOW TO BE AWARE OF GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION

Recognize that our culture has practiced gender bias communication for years. In the media we are desensitized to stereotypes in the following ways:

- -commercials (housewife cleaning, models in beer commercials, male wearing a suit or at work, women talking or having a casual lunch)
- -toys (new talking Barbie doll that says "math is tough," girl toys and boy toys)
- -literature (males are the workers, females the housewife)
- -school books (females passive, males active, females follow and serve others, males lead and rescue others) "Man" is used to describe people in general, females rarely depicted in scientific careers, when they are, they are depicted as spinsters
- -history books devote one page out of 800 pages to women and their achievements
- -wording is used which detracts from the significance of women's achievements (i.e., women were "given" the right to vote)
- -English literature anthologies use fewer females authors than males.

Be aware that communication patterns are different for males and females. Research shows that in groups of mixed gender, males tend to

- -talk more, and what they say carries more weight
- -talk for longer periods of time
- -take more turns at speaking
- -exert more control over the topic of conversation
- -interrupt females more frequently than females interrupt males.

Males and females grow up differently; their conversational styles are different. Males learn to be more independent and take "center stage." Females learn to talk for closeness and intimacy. Some males see conversations as a one up/one down position. Females and males may use the same words, yet the meanings are different.

## HOW TO OVERCOME GENDER BIAS COMMUNICATION IN YOUR CLASSROOM

First, be aware that it may exist in your classroom. Then try several of the following suggestions:

1. Ask students to fill out a student evaluation form.
2. Ask a colleague to observe your classroom.
3. Videotape your class.
4. Attend workshops on gender bias communication.

Some suggestions for trying now (remember it takes 21 days to change a behavior):

Scan your classroom from one side to the other, rather than focusing on a few students all of the time.

Rotate your rows; ask students to do this every class period.

Wait 5-8 seconds for any student to respond to a question.

Never group students by gender.

Do not praise students for nonacademic achievements during class.



Presented at WISCO 1993 by L.W. Orick, Albuquerque T-VI

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## TEACHERS' SELF-EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

To increase your awareness of stereotypes, spend some time observing your behavior in the classroom and then complete the questionnaire.

1. Do you group students according to gender and/or pit one gender against the other in competition?
2. Do you make value judgements about students based on their appearances?
3. Do you expect behavioral differences in males and females?
4. Do you expect differences in the academic performances of males and females?
5. Do you emphasize the attractiveness of females and the strength and abilities of males?
6. Do you make an effort to change sex-stereotyped material that you must use in the classroom?
7. Do you make an effort to free your language from sexist terminology?
8. Do you discipline males more harshly than females?
9. Do you give males more instructional time?
10. Do you call on only males to do chores involving strength?
11. Do you encourage dominant roles for females as well as males?
12. Do you encourage friendships between the sexes?

Adapted from KNOW, Inc., P.O. Box 86031, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

## GUIDELINES FOR CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Have a friend, colleague, or teaching assistant observe some of your classes on a random basis. Have the observer answer the following questions after their observation of your classroom.

1. How many males do you call on to answer questions? How many females?

2. Which students (female or male) participate in class more frequently through answering questions or making comments? Is the number disproportionate enough that you should encourage some students to participate more frequently?

3. Do interruptions occur when an individual is talking? If so, who does the interrupting?

4. Is your verbal response to students positive? adverse? encouraging? Is it the same for all students? If not, why? (Valid reasons occur from time to time for reacting or responding to a particular student in a highly specified manner.)

5. Do you tend to face or address one section of the classroom more than others? Do you establish eye contact with certain students more than others?

6. What gestures, postures, or facial expressions do you use and are they different for females, males or minority students?

Adapted from Gappa & Pearce 1982



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## AUDIOTAPE SELF-EVALUATION OF YOUR CLASS

Have a student record some of your class sessions. Self-analysis of the tapes could provide answers to the following questions:

1. Which students do you call on by name?

2. What language patterns are you using? Do you regularly use male referencing or the generic "he" or "man"? Are stereotypical assumptions about women and men revealed in your classroom dialogue?

3. Are examples and anecdotes drawn from men's lives only?

4. Can differential patterns of reinforcement be detected from the tapes?

Adapted from Gappa & Pearce 1982



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STUDENT PERCEPTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Answer each of the following questions. Choose only one answer for each question.

1. Your age _____

2. Sex of student
   1. Female
   2. Male

3. Sex of instructor
   1. Female
   2. Male

4. How often do you voluntarily answer questions or contribute to class discussion in class?
   1. Never
   2. One to three times during the course
   3. An average of once a week
   4. An average of two to three times a week
   5. An average of one or more times a day

5. How often does the instructor call on you or ask you to respond to a question or comment?
   1. Instructor does not call on anyone
   2. One to three times during the course
   3. An average of once a week
   4. An average of two to three times a week
   5. Never

6. How does the instructor most frequently call on you?
   1. By name
   2. By pointing
   3. By eye contact/looking directly at me
   4. Instructor never calls on me

7. How many times have you raised your hand to ask a question or make a comment and found that the instructor does not respond?
   1. Once or twice during the course
   2. Three or more times during the course
   3. I am called on when I raise my hand
   4. I never raise my hand



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8. Why do you think the instructor does not respond when you raise your hand?
   1. Too many students want to speak
   2. Others beat me to it
   3. Teacher does not see or hear me
   4. Teacher ignores me
   5. This situation never occurs

9. How many times have you wanted to participate in class by asking a question or making a comment but chosen not to do so?
   1. Once or twice during the course
   2. Three or more times during the course
   3. Nearly every day
   4. Not at all, because I participate when I want to
   5. I usually do not want to participate

10. If you have wanted to participate in class by asking a question or making a comment but did not do so, what was your reason for not doing so?
   1. Felt insecure, inadequate, or uncertain
   2. Another student asked question or commented first
   3. Too many students in class
   4. Disagreed with teacher but chose not to speak out

11. In your opinion, which students most frequently participate in class?
   1. Those who are most knowledgeable or most interested in the subject
   2. Those who are seeking clarification or want more information
   3. Those who are trying to show off or get more attention
   4. I have not noticed

12. In your opinion, which students ask the most questions and make the most comments in class?
   1. Female student(s)
   2. Male student(s)
   3. Female and male students equally
   4. I have not noticed

13. How does the instructor react to the questions you ask in class?
   1. Encourages me to question or comment again
   2. Discourages me from commenting or asking a question again
   3. Neither encourages nor discourages me
   4. I never participate



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14. In your opinion, how does the teacher react to opinions and comments given by other students in the class?
    1. Respects the opinions of students in the class
    2. Does not respect the opinions of students in the class
    3. Embarrasses or "puts down" students for their opinions
    4. I did not notice

15. Does the instructor make humorous references that you feel are offensive, embarrassing, or belittling to any individuals or groups?
    1. Never
    2. Once or twice
    3. Occasionally
    4. Frequently

Adapted from Gappa & Pearce, 1982.



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